

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend Claims 1 to 4, 6 to 19 and 21 to 28 as follows. The claims, as pending in the subject application, read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the method comprising:

adding a self-describing attribute tag to ~~each~~ said at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes ~~an action to be performed on the~~ a manner of retention in which the meta-data element, and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from another digital image are to be retained, in a case where the two images are combined, wherein the retention of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data elements.

2. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the ~~action to be performed~~ manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the two images are combined.

3. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the ~~action to be performed~~ manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should both be ~~kept~~ retained individually in a case where the two images are combined.

4. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the ~~action to be performed~~ manner of retention is that the meta-data elements in question should be ~~kept~~ retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded in a case where the two images are combined.

5. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no self describing attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default self describing attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no self describing attribute tag.

6. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 5, wherein the default self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention ~~action to be performed~~ is that the meta-data elements in question should be ~~kept~~ retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded in a case where the images are combined.

7. (Currently Amended) A method of augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the method comprising:

adding a self describing attribute tag to ~~each~~ said at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes ~~an action to be performed on the~~ a manner of retention in which a corresponding meta-data element is to

be retained in a the case where the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

8. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention ~~action to be performed~~ is that the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the image is transformed.

9. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention ~~action to be performed~~ is that the meta-data elements in question should be ~~kept~~ retained individually in a case where the image is transformed.

10. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 8, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default self describing attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

11. (Currently Amended) A method of combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element ~~each~~ having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the corresponding ~~action to~~

~~be performed on the meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the images are combined, the method comprising the steps of:~~

~~reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the corresponding action meta-data element is to be retained; and~~

~~combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and retaining the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements, depending on the attribute tags corresponding to in accordance with the identified action for those meta-data elements.~~

12. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 10 ~~11~~, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention ~~action to be performed~~ is that the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the images are combined.

13. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 10 ~~11~~, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention ~~action to be performed~~ is that the meta-data elements in question should be ~~kept~~ retained individually in a case where the images are combined.

14. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 10 ~~11~~, wherein the attribute tag[[s]] is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention ~~action to be performed~~ is that the meta-data elements in question should be ~~kept~~ retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded in a case where the images are combined.

15. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim ~~10~~ 11, wherein in the event an image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

16. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the default attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention ~~action to be performed~~ is that the meta-data elements in question should be ~~kept~~ retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded, in a case where the images are combined.

17. (Currently Amended) A method of ~~updating~~ retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element ~~each~~ having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the ~~corresponding action to be performed on the meta-data element~~ is to be retained in a case where the image is transformed, the method comprising the steps of:

reading the attribute tag of ~~each~~ the meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the ~~corresponding action~~ meta-data element is to be retained; and

~~updating~~ retaining ~~each~~ the meta-data element of the image in accordance with the ~~identified action for that~~ attribute tag corresponding to the meta-data element,

wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

18. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention ~~action to be performed~~ is that the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the image is transformed.

19. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention ~~action to be performed~~ is that the meta-data element in question should be ~~kept~~ retained in a case where the image is transformed.

20. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

21. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the apparatus comprising:

means for adding a self-describing attribute tag to ~~each~~ said at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes an

~~action to be performed on the a manner of retention in which a meta-data element and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from another digital image are to be retained in a case where the two images are combined, wherein the retention of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data elements.~~

22. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the apparatus comprising:

~~means for adding a self describing attribute tag to each said at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes an action to be performed on the a manner of retention in which the meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.~~

23. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element ~~each~~ having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the corresponding action to be performed on the meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the images are combined, the apparatus comprising:

~~means for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the corresponding action meta-data element is to be retained;~~
and

means for combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and for retaining the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements depending on the attribute tags associated with ~~in accordance with the identified action~~ for those meta-data elements.

24. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for ~~updating~~ retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element ~~each~~ having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the ~~corresponding action to be performed on the meta-data element is to be retained~~ in a case where the image is transformed, the apparatus comprising:

means for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the corresponding ~~action~~ meta-data element is to be retained; and

means for ~~updating~~ retaining each meta-data element of the image in accordance with the ~~identified action for that~~ attribute tag of each corresponding meta-data element, wherein the retention of each meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

25. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the computer program comprising:

code for adding a self-describing attribute tag to ~~each~~ at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes ~~an action to be~~

~~performed on the a manner of retention in which the meta-data element and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from another digital image are to be retained in a case where the two images are combined, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.~~

26. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the computer program comprising:

code for adding a self describing attribute tag to each at least one meta-data element, wherein each attribute tag added to a meta-data element describes ~~an action to be performed on the~~ a manner of retention in which the meta-data element is to be retained in a case where the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

27. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element ~~each~~ having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which the corresponding action to be performed on the meta-data element is to be retained in a case where images are combined, the computer program comprising:

code for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the corresponding action meta-data element is to be retained;

and

code for combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and retaining the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements, depending on the attribute tags associated with ~~in accordance with the identified action for those meta-data elements.~~

28. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for ~~updating~~ retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element ~~each~~ having associated therewith an attribute tag which describes a manner of retention in which ~~corresponding action to be performed on the meta-data element is to be~~ retained in a case where the image is transformed, the computer program comprising:

code for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify the manner of retention in which the ~~corresponding action~~ meta-data element is to be retained;
and

code for ~~updating~~ retaining each meta-data element of the image in accordance with the ~~identified action for that~~ attribute tag associated with each meta-data element, wherein the retention of each meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.